

THE GAZETTE.

SATURDAY MORNING, December 21, 1899.

TOMBSTONE LITERATURE.

Last week Dr. McCull, of Toronto, delivered in this city a very curious and interesting lecture upon the tombstone literature, which we find extensively reported in the *Colonist* as follows:

"An epitaph or inscription on a tombstone might be properly described, if not correctly defined, as an inscription in a monument of the dead and to improve the living. In the first place, such an inscription should be simple; there ought to be no indication of extravagance. The first epitaph he would quote which violates that rule was that of Pope on Milton:

"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night,
God said—Let there be light, and there was light."
Such language as that was not fit to be applied to any mortal, it was applied by the Almighty to that light which was to illumine the whole world. (Applauds.) The next he would quote was that of Sir George Osley in 1633:

"Ask not who is buried here,
Go seek the Commons, ask the Shrine,
Go seek the Church—thou wilt find him,
As well as his name, as well as his sign."
Then, if thou see below this and on,
To ask a name, or if thou canst not read,
Then bring it home, and let it be read."
The seventeenth century was remarkable for its taste in this respect, also for its extravagance, as the following would show:

This was written on Samuel Ratkows, Steward to the Earl of Derby, of Derby Hall, in 1655, and evidently over the mark.

"His life was an academy of virtue,
His conversation a president of piety,
He was a mirror for the church,
His good name a place for memory,
His death a passage to glory,
His epitaph a perfecting of glory,
Where he now sits, triumphs and sings
With angels, archangeles, cherubims, and seraphims."
Holy, holy, holy, etc.

While it was plain that epitaphs should not be too long, they should not be too short. Of these he had many examples; all of which were selected from church yards and cemeteries in the mother country. He would quote a few, one in Stenography read as follows:

"Here lies the body of Daniel Sand,
A learned weaver, and that's all."
(Laughter.) Another at St. Michael's crooked line ran thus:

"Here both wrapped in clay
The body of William Wray,
I have no more to say."
(Laughter.) Another essential requisite in such inscriptions are that they should be true. Nothing could justify adulation, flattery, or satire. The following is to be found in Cheshire, written in 1772, on Edward Peckreine Bostell:

"Is this his death-bed? No, it is his shrine!
Behold him rising to an angel,
Entering the courts of celestial rest,
He leaves his flag of hope
Through the merits of our Blessed Redeemer,
Riding before a stately gale of Abolition,
Till he makes with all the rest an assured Faith."

The happy part of a joyful resurrection,
He lived in the fear and love of God,
And died in Christ.
Believe and look with triumph on his tomb."

In St. Edward's Salisbury, there was one on a Saxon burgher, which ends in these words:

"When a zealous religionist looks the grave green,
The Groom's a noble protection he takes,
Each person passing, taken will justify this,
Transcendently good, superlatively wise."

But if it were true that there should be no flattery, there was no justification for their being directly false (an example of which the lecturer cited), nor for being satirical. There was an old maxim, "*Deumini ut nisi bonum*," which should be adhered to in this respect. There was an instance in the case of an old man named Charters, on whom Dr. Arlathout wrote the following:

"Indignant reader,
Thou art not this life useless to mankind,
Providence convicts at his execrable designs,
To give to after ages a conspicuous proof and example of how small estimation is exorbitant wealth in the sight of God,
By his bestowing it on the most unworthy of all mortals."

Among these unkind inscriptions he might quote the following, which was to be found in Old Grey Friars, Edinburgh:

"Here sung in love my wife doth lie;
Now, she is at rest—and so am I."
"Beneath this stone, and not above it,
Lies the remains of Anna Lovett;
Be pleased, good readers, not to shove it,
Least she should come again above it.
For to you and I, no one does covet,
To see again the Anna Lovett."

Another in Stepping stones thus:

"Whether he lives or whether he dies,
I only laugh at the thought of his rise;
Where he goes, I go, and where he goes,
Nobody knows and nobody cares."

Another characteristic of inscriptions was that they should be serious and solemn; not trifling with the subject, as puns, or half-fetched allegories, or metaphors. (The lecturer, thought puns very good things in their place, notwithstanding Dr. Johnson; but there should be no trifling with death.) The first he would quote of this nature was in the time of Henry III., on a person named John de Grey, who married on John de Grey, whom premature death prevented from being an earl.

A very common thing in the 16th and 17th centuries was punning on names. For example, the following, written in 1559, on Sir Richard Worme:

"Does worm eat worm? Knight Worme this truth confesseth,
For here with worms lies Worme, a dish of worms,
Does worm eat Worme? Since Worme will this deny,
For Worme with worms a dish of worms doth deny,
This is, and this is not, a dish of worms,
The certain Worme is hid without his worms."

Another was on Mr. Cave, in Leicester:

"Here in this grave there lies a Cave,
We call a Cave a grave,
It Cave he grave and grave he Cave,
Then reader, judge, I crave,
Whether doth Cave lie here in grave,
Or grave lie here in cave,
(If so be it be here in cave,
Then, grave, where is thy victory?)
Go, reader, and report here lies a Cave,
Who conquers death and buries his own grave."

In this category he would quote an inscription which Dr. Fuller led to be placed on his tomb—an extraordinary thing for such a man.

"Here lies Fuller's earth."

Another:

"Here lies one blossom out of death,
Who lived a happy life and died a happy death."
It was also very much the practice to pun on professional callings and trades, (examples of which were given.) Among the metaphors the Doctor quoted the following:

"Here lies the dust of Margaret Gwyn,
Who was so very pure within,
That she chipped a hole out of her earthly skin,
And made it heretofore a chimney."

THE FIRST SKEEL PEAR TREE STILL GROWS.

—Frank Collier writes to the Philadelphia Bulletin:

"About the year 1814, in company with the late Gen. Francis Gurney, I had the gratification of seeing the original Skeel pear-tree, on the farm of Mr. Lawrence Skeel, in the 'Neck,' late Passapatan Township, a few miles south of the limits of this city.

"The pear-tree to which I desire to ask your attention stood some little distance from the eastern front of Mr. Skeel's farm house. It had every appearance of vigorous maturity, was unusually large, and bore its luscious fruit abundantly. From the solitary pear-tree had been obtained by Gen. Gurney, with which he communicated numerous congeneric trees at his country seat, Cherry Grove, on Shippen's lane, below South street; all of which trees proved prolific in fruit, and it was principally through his well known liberality that this kind of pear became disseminated, and now so generally known and desired, by the name he gave it, of Skeel pear."

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